

Hard Fought Game 2 Ends In 42 – 42 Tie; Lots of Firsts In This One!

Game 2 was played on a different practice field at Marshall High for the first time, as the game of "musical fields" continued to inconvenience the HBL's new season. An interesting breakdown of teams for this game saw Eric, Donnie, Aaron, Rich, Steve and Edwin face Manuel, Earl, John, Ben, Macky, Daniel and Miguel in a contest in which several players rotated between teams to keep an even balance.

There would be some other firsts in this game, and they'd be noticed early. On the very first play of the game, Aaron picked off a John Duffy pass for his first interception of the year, and ran it back 30 yards for the game's first touchdown. It marked the first time that the first pass of the game was intercepted for a touchdown. Try saying *that* paragraph 4 times fast!

Concern was expressed that perhaps there would be too much height on one side, with Aaron and Rich teaming up for the very first time. The speed supposedly resided on the other team, however, in the form of Daniel and the Mach 5 Miguel. In addition to that quick combo, Manuel's team would also get Ben, who was arriving late. As the game progressed, it became apparent that it would still be anybody's contest.

Eric saw his first action at quarterback since returning from vacation, and found it to be a bit rough in the early going. He tossed two interceptions—one going to Earl and the other to Ben, both leading to points on the board. In Ben's case, he returned the pick all the way for a touchdown, marking the first time in HBL history that 2 interceptions were returned for TDs in the same game. After the impressive opening score, John led his team back to not only tie but take an impressive lead, going up 28–7 at one point. But the game would not turn into a blowout, as Eric and Edwin combined strategies for another classic Espejo comeback. It would start with a touchdown pass to Donnie to bring them within two scores going into the half.

The second half would begin as the first did, with Aaron finding the endzone on the very first play. This time, it was Eric hitting last season's League MVP in stride on a streak up the middle for a dramatic 80-yard score. If it wasn't before, it was now clear that the game was on. In fact, Edwin and Eric weren't finished—not by a long shot. Edwin fired some of the most accurate passes we've seen to date, spreading the ball around to Donnie and the ever-effective Steve. The offense continued to pound away at a defense that shifted blindly at times, putting up 4 unanswered touchdowns to take the lead, 35–28.

The comeback was certainly not easy, and at times looked downright scary. On a 4th and long situation, Eric called for a play action double-reverse between wideouts Rich and Aaron. Rich went in motion first, and at the snap sold the fake handoff. As Aaron came from the left side, there was a split-second miscommunication between the two, and before either could stop they met in a head-on collision. Despite the impact, the HBL's Twin Towers would not collapse. "We did the dance at about 30 miles per hour!" Aaron would say after clearing the cobwebs. Rich shook it off in time to see Donnie pull in the big 4th down catch to keep the drive alive; a drive that would ultimately prove to give their team the lead.

With John pulling most of the quarterbacking duties, Manuel had the chance to test his receiving skills, and he once again showed that he can be an equal threat catching the ball. In fact, with 7 catches and about 65 yards, he was one of the games most productive receivers.

What HBL game would be complete without its share of circus catches and Jedi jukes? There were some beauties in Game 2, with Aaron backtracking to somehow catch a pass that was not only intended for his teammate Eric, but was batted away by a defending Manuel! Add the fact that it was a 4th down play, and you've got a catch for the highlight reels. On the Jedi front, Earl was in fine form pulling in some nice catches of his own, but it was the footwork that made his plays even more special. He absolutely danced around defenders on Saturday, leaving them dazed and confused in his wake. Add to *that* fact that it only takes one hand to tag him, and you've got an HBL player with unprecedented evasive skills.

The game was at its most dramatic in the closing seconds, after John hit Eric in the endzone to tie the game as the clock wound down. Rushing to get to the line, Edwin commanded his team and marched them downfield, crossing midfield and threatening to win at literally the last second. Steve made an incredible fingertip catch to drive even closer, but on the last play of the game it was Ben coming up with a huge deflection to prevent Aaron from making what was sure to have been the winning score. As John and Edwin had business to attend to, both teams decided against playing an overtime period. For the first time ever, an HBL game ended in a tie.

MVP Game 2 Aaron Goodmiller

With 5 out of 8 votes submitted, the Game 2 MVP award goes to Aaron, who started the game off with a bang with that huge interception and return for a touchdown. He was there when he had to be to pick up the yardage on 3rd and 4th downs, and did so with his usual penchant for the circus catch.

Aaron was also effective throughout the game on defense, sticking to his man and knocking down two passes that would otherwise have been completions.

SIDENOTE

In the interest of making the games the best that they can be, the issue of the single game MVP award has been brought up for debate. Last season, the commissioners simply met and chose an MVP after each game. This season, players have also been asked to vote.

HBL commissioners are considering eliminating the single game MVP award, and instead, reserving the voting for the year-end League MVP award. In lieu of the single game MVP, players would continue to vote on a Play of the Game.

The idea behind this is to eliminate any competitiveness and/or frustration that the award could incur. In most games, there are several big plays and many MVP candidates—in fact, after Game 1, all of the MVP votes submitted were for different players! Another thing to consider is the fact that not everyone submits a vote—when this happens we're forced to let the majority rule.

The issue is for each player to debate—we want to know what you think! Do you like having a single game MVP? Do you like having a say in who's chosen? Would you prefer choosing only a Play of the Game instead, and selecting a League MVP at the end of the season? Voice your opinion this Saturday at the game, and we'll take a vote on it!

GAME 2 NOTES

Aaron scored the first touchdown of the game for the 2nd straight week

Donnie was a potent pass rusher, swatting down one of John's passes at the line of scrimmage

Earl recorded his 2nd interception of the season—he's had one in both games so far

Ben has the longest interception return so far this year (60 yards, TD)

Aaron's 80-yard TD catch ties this season's record set last week by Steve

John had a personal best 3 sacks, and leads the league in sacks so far

JP & Alan missed Game 2—keep track, all you Iron Man hopefuls!

Eric attempted a pass to Ben that just missed, but was regarded as one of the finest passes in heavy coverage ever seen in the HBL

Quotes of the Game

TOP CHOICES FROM ENTRIES SUBMITTED BY HBL PLAYERS

"Damn, I wasn't ready for that!"
— Donnie, after a steamrolling pass rush by John Duffy (winner with 3 votes!)

"Aaaahhhhhhh!!!!"
— Macky, after trying in vain to avoid a tag by Eric

"Dude, there's something wrong with you—your body's not normal!"
— Eric, on Earl's Jedi mind tricks as he passed right by him for more yards

ASSORTED STATS

Some of the stats reported:

AARON GOODMILLER

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 7–10 |
| YARDS | 150–200 |
| TOUCHDOWNS | 2 |
| RUSHING | |
| CARRIES | 3 |
| YARDS | 15 |
| DEFENSE | |
| PASSES DEFENDED | 2 |
| INTERCEPTIONS | 1 |
| INT RETURN YARDS | 30 |
| INT FOR TOUCHDOWN | 1 |

MANUEL MENDOZA

| | |
|---------------|----|
| PASSING | |
| ATTEMPTS | 5 |
| COMPLETIONS | 2 |
| YARDS | 30 |
| INTERCEPTIONS | 1 |
| TOUCHDOWNS | 1 |
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 7 |
| YARDS | 65 |
| RUSHING | |
| CARRIES | 2 |
| YARDS | 10 |

JOHN DUFFY

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| PASSING | |
| ATTEMPTS | 45 |
| COMPLETIONS | 20 |
| YARDS | 200–250 |
| INTERCEPTIONS | 2 |
| TOUCHDOWNS | 6 |
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 1 |
| YARDS | 60 |
| RUSHING | |
| CARRIES | 2 SCRAMBLES |
| YARDS | 25–30 |

| | |
|---------|---|
| DEFENSE | |
| SACKS | 3 |

DONNIE CONTY

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 3 |
| YARDS | 20–30 |
| TOUCHDOWNS | 1 |
| RUSHING | |
| CARRIES | 1 |
| YARDS | 3 |
| DEFENSE | |
| PASSES DEFENDED | 1 |

EARL ESPEJO

| | |
|------------------|------|
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 5–6 |
| YARDS | 100+ |
| TOUCHDOWNS | 1 |
| DEFENSE | |
| SACKS | 1 |
| PASSES DEFENDED | 1 |
| INTERCEPTIONS | 1 |
| INT RETURN YARDS | 5 |

BEN ROA

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| RECEIVING | |
| CATCHES | 4 |
| YARDS | 35 |
| DEFENSE | |
| PASSES DEFENDED | 3 |
| INTERCEPTIONS | 1 |
| INT RETURN YARDS | 60 |
| INT FOR TOUCHDOWN | 1 |



Defense wins games. You've heard it a million times. It's true. In fact, you've seen it happen in our very own HBL games time and time again: defenses stopping people on 4th down; defenses forcing turnovers and stealing momentum. You can feel the energy of a defense every time those big 3rd and 4th downs come up — players feed off of it and practically will themselves to be wherever the ball is, all in the interest of getting it back in the hands of their offense.

When I learned to play this game, it was from a defensive standpoint. Not only was defense a little more suited to my ability, the very philosophy appealed to me as well. To this day, I love the notion that a defense actually has the opportunity to do more to win the game than an offense, whose sole responsibility is to put points on the board. The defensive players primarily must prevent the other team from scoring—but in addition, have the chance to score a few points themselves. For me, defense is the best of both worlds.

We're the hunters—lurking in the backfield waiting for that wayward pass over the middle, or that tipped ball that just grazed the fingertips of some unfortunate receiver. Speaking of unfortunate receivers, in high school, hitting was the biggest part of it all. My God, where else could you run full force and throw yourself at someone with nothing but violence in mind? I was put in the middle linebacker slot from day one, and I relished it. I was taller than most of the guys on the line in front of me, and as a result, could usually see where each play was going and was able to have some part in breaking it up. My knees still ache from hitting and being hit by incoming running backs, and anyone who played the position understands why my fingers stiffen and crack the way they do today!

Defense is also the side to talk the talk, at least while your team is winning! I once yelled "peekaboo" at a nervous halfback, and later regretted it when he broke one loose and dragged me like John Riggins did Don McNeal in Super Bowl XVII. But if any of you should ever meet a former Arundel High School quarterback who calls himself "Hawaiian" Brian Tua, ask him about the time that Meade linebacker cleaned his clock—and got booted for doing a hula-girl sack dance over him. Aloha, Baby! Hehe!

Now that I'm an official Has-Been, the game is different, but certainly no less fun. The main difference is that I no longer get to hit people. (That's what trees are for!) Seriously, it's become much more of a chess match these days. I've tried my hand at defensive back, and have had guys like Daniel absolutely scorch me. Ouch. But that's what it's about—learning new things and adapting to new situations. What I love is that I can still surprise myself once in a while—defending passes and receivers that I didn't think I could. Seeing teammates (as well as opponents) also surprise themselves with a big play makes it all the more special. *That's* what HBL football is to me.

Each week, I get to spend a couple hours playing football with my best friends, and I love it. It really is like being a kid again. I can tell you that I look forward to our HBL games more than I ever looked forward to a high school game! I have to confess that while I should probably be devising offensive plans throughout the week, instead, my mind plays defensive coverage over and over. I'll sometimes watch videotape of past games, taking note of receivers' favorite routes and catch tendencies... I also don't sleep well on Friday nights—I have this recurring nightmare where I can see Manuel ready to throw long to Aaron... I catch up, and as I jump we both get our hands on the ball—but he always comes down with it and scores a touchdown. (No, wait... that's not a dream—that really happens every week...)

With surehanded guys like Ben, Aaron and Earl hovering in the backfield, and younger speedsters like Daniel and Miguel playing man-to-man, the state of defense in the HBL is stronger than ever. Note to self: I think I just listed the HBL equivalent of the All-Madden defensive team... let's make sure these guys never get to play together!

Rich played 2 seasons with the Laurel Spartans and Meade Mustangs, and who knows how many years of Maryland City peewee football.

Submit your own column! Write whatever you want, and simply e-mail it. Interview columns coming soon!

The goal is to bring as many voices to the newsletter as possible!

JERSEY UPDATE

Donnie has announced that the official HBL jerseys are ready, and they kick ass! However, some money is still owed. If you ordered a jersey, please bring your money this Saturday:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------|
| The following players owe \$13.00 : | Eric | Aaron |
| | Rich | Manuel |
| | Earl | Steve |

Everyone else owes \$21.00.

Please bring the money you owe this Saturday. Jerseys will be held until payment is made in full.

Donnie has undertaken this daunting task all by himself—let's show him how grateful we are by repaying him on time! Thanks for everyone's cooperation!

HBL Poll of the Week

WHAT HAS BEEN THE HARDEST COLLISION THE HBL HAS SEEN?

- Jebo & Carlo** During last season's Game 1 in Centreville
- Steve & Mo** During last season's game at Galyans
- Eric & Aaron** after Steve's fumble in Game 1
- Aaron & Rich** in the back-field mishap of Game 2

E-MAIL YOUR CHOICE NOW!

Last week's results:
CIRCUS CATCH OF GAME 1:
RICH'S 1-HANDED CATCH OVER ERIC ON THE LEFT SIDELINE

Plays of the Game

TOP CHOICES FROM ENTRIES SUBMITTED BY HBL PLAYERS

80-yard TD pass to Aaron to start the second half (winner by 2 votes)

Ben knocking down a pass to Aaron 10 yards from the endzone with 20 seconds left in the game, sealing the tie.

"The Collision"

Aaron's catch on a pass intended for Eric and deflected by Manuel

Donnie swatting down John's pass